

Sermon August 5 2007 "He's A Fool Because..." Luke 12:13-21

A 6th grade teacher posed the following problem to her arithmetic classes:

"A wealthy man dies and leaves ten million dollars. One-fifth is to go to his wife, one-fifth is to go to his son, one-sixth to his butler, and the rest to charity. Now, what does each get?"

After a very long silence in the classroom, little Kate raised her hand.

The teacher called on her and with complete sincerity in her voice, Kate answered, "A lawyer!"

She's probably right. Where there's a will, there is often a lawsuit.

Today's gospel story and parable has Jesus teaching in front of a large crowd. Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." What we can assume here is, it would have been a younger brother making the request to Jesus, for Jewish law prescribed that the oldest son receives $\frac{2}{3}$ of their father's estate, and the younger son $\frac{1}{3}$.

Despite the request Jesus refuses to get involved, because Jesus' solution to the young son's dilemma is at a different level of consciousness, a different level of understanding than what the young son would expect. The young son believes more money...an equal inheritance, will take away his internal distress—his lack of peace—about the inequality of shares. Jesus knows the son's peace of mind and peace of heart would never come in the form of earthly treasures such as money anyway, but would come not in a "form" at all, for his true happiness could never be in the things of this world, but in the value he placed on God, on love, and how *that* might play out in his world.

Several years ago there was a very powerful movie starring John Hurt called "The Doctor." This particular doctor was a very businesslike, rather glib surgeon, who had absolutely no rapport with his patients. One day he has in his office a Hispanic farmer and his family. He has run some tests on the man and he is seriously ill. He matter-of-factly suggests to him: sir, if I were you, I would get my affairs in order. At that the Hispanic farmer places one

arm around his wife, and the other arm around his children, and he says very simply, but very profoundly: Sir, my affairs are in order.

To illustrate a total contrast:

Comedian Jack Benny, from TV's Golden age, had a skit which illustrated how we place money ahead of everything. He is walking down the street when suddenly he is approached by an armed robber, "Your money or your life!" There is a long pause. Jack does nothing. The robber impatiently inquired, "Well?" Jack replied, "Don't rush me, I'm thinking it over." Jesus would probably say, "You see, this is what I mean!"

In order to help us grow more spiritually mature and get a glimpse of what God's face looks like in all this, Jesus tells the young son and the whole crowd a parable . There was once a man who had an unbroken run of prosperity. In today's language, he had successfully played the commodities market. So prosperous did he become that his barns could not hold all of his crops. His solution was to tear down these barns and build bigger and better barns. Then, with his financial security in hand, he could sit back and truly enjoy life. His philosophy was: eat, drink, and be merry.

At first glance it may appear that this parable is about money. It's not. Jesus doesn't call the man a fool because he's an accomplished creator of wealth, but b/c the man holds more value *in his wealth* than he does God or what we like to call, "treasures in heaven." Jesus calls him a fool b/c of his overestimated value in himself as a solo act. We're assured this given his use of the word "I" and "my" ten times in four verses. The parable's clear, the man finds his source of bounty in himself rather than in others or God. He's a fool b/c he forgot what his real business in life is. Jesus is suggesting to us that our business in life goes far beyond tally sheets, investments, and tax forms. Our real business is that of our humanity.

For three weeks now Rev. Mercer and I have iterated: God calls us to a life of success—Yeh, sure—but success in what? In an ever increasing income only? Is that our success hoped for? Accumulating more real estate, more land? Is that our hoped for success? Having more of this and more of that as our *reflection of success*?

Leo Tolstoy once wrote a story about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his lot. He wanted more of everything. Here is how

Tolstoy tells the story: One day a farmer received a novel offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in a day. The only catch in the deal was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown. Early the next morning he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday he was very tired, but he kept going, covering more and more ground. Well into the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. He quickened his pace and as the sun began to sink low in the sky, he began to run, knowing that if he did not make it back by sundown the opportunity to become an even bigger landholder would be lost.

As the sun began to sink below the horizon he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed, blood streaming from his mouth. In a few minutes he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. The title of Tolstoy's story was: How Much Land Does a Man Need? (Adapted from Bits & Pieces, November, 1991.)

In the end, Tolstoy suggests, all a person really owns is a 6 by 3 piece of earth, therefore, we are better off putting our confidence elsewhere. Jesus, like Tolstoy, is warning us not to put our trust in the false promise of materialism—**Things** cannot make us happy. What materialism does is substitute. It's a substitute for our sense of *need* to be fooled into being fulfilled. To be fooled of anything is to eventually be sadly disappointed.

What we *do want* to be accumulating is a stronger and stronger love for God with an intention to surrender to what God's Will would joyfully be giving to us anyway. What we *do want* to be accumulating is a stronger faith in the Source of the Universe to bring to us a fulfillment of all our needs; which it always does, faithfully, if and when we simply get out of It' way.

The only resource that can possibly address our deepest longing is God. It is God that will be our rock and our sanity and our security; not a mutual fund. When the doctor calls us in one day and says: It is cancer. It is God that will offer us the peace and calm that we so desperately seek.

The man in the parable was a fool because he banked on full barns. As people of God as disciples of Christ we store our money in the stomachs of the hungry, the minds of the uneducated, the bodies of the sick, the spirits of

the oppressed, and in *being* the only Gospel someone may experience today. Then we shall be rich in God's eyes.

Let us pray: We confess O God that there are times when we 'set our minds' on false and unworthy fulfillment. Often these pursuits fool us into thinking we **need** to acquire and possess: *Lead us not into temptation...* bless our thoughts to see and feel the quality of life, You, as our Source of life want us to have and know.

O God with the richness of Your Spirit we pray for that quality of life to be revealed in the lives of those in our prayer corner. With You we bless: Barbara, Willard, Sharon, Tom, Patrick, Dale, Gertrude, Stacy, Jerry, Karen, Cindy, Devyn, Melvin, Eugene, Jean, Bonnie, Marilyn, Elaine, Bev, those in our Church Family who are shut in and in Nursing Homes, and those serving our country's military.

O God with the richness of Your Spirit we pray for that quality of life to be revealed in the lives of those whom we served yesterday at the homeless "Gathering." With You we bless their poverty, their loneliness, their fear, asking for the light of Your love to disintegrate their darkness.

O God with You we bless: the family and friends of Your daughter, Cindy, who now lives eternally with You, and for new life in Kendra Marie. May we all be reminded of who and Whose we are. And now, as we prepare our hearts and minds for Communion, hear us as we pray the prayer Jesus taught us: Our Father...